

2014



# Louisiana Blue Crab

## Commercial Rules and Regulations

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries



A black and white photograph of a man on a boat. The man is wearing a beanie and a plaid shirt, smiling and holding a large wire mesh trap. The boat has a license plate that reads "LA 2926 FR" and a small Louisiana state emblem. The background shows a body of water and some distant land.

# Contents

- 03 Harvesters
- 08 Industry Support
- 09 Buyers and Sellers
- 11 Quick Facts

# Harvesters

THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT AN OFFICIAL COPY OF THE LAWS AND SHOULD NOT BE RELIED UPON AS SUCH. THIS PUBLICATION SUMMARIZES EXISTING LAWS. AS LAWS MAY CHANGE FOLLOWING THE PRINTING OF THIS PUBLICATION, THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION HEREIN IS NOT GUARANTEED. IT IS THE OBLIGATION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE READER TO BE AWARE OF CURRENT LAWS, INCLUDING LOUISIANA REVISED STATUTES TITLE 56, OFFICIAL REGULATIONS OF THE LOUISIANA WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES COMMISSION, LOCAL AND PARISH ORDINANCES, AND FEDERAL LAWS.

## Commercial Harvester Licenses and Fees

To harvest blue crab commercially in Louisiana's waters, you must have the following licenses issued by LDWF:

- A commercial fisherman's license (\$55 resident, \$460 nonresident)\*
- A vessel license in the vessel owner's name (\$15 resident, \$60 nonresident), unless crabbing with legal land-based gear or in areas not designated as saltwater
- Licenses for the fishing gear you're using\*:
  - For any legal number of crab traps (\$25 resident, \$100 nonresident). You must also pay an annual gear fee (\$10 resident, \$40 nonresident) in addition to trap license fees.
  - For each butterfly, cast, dip, drop, skimmer, or trawl net (\$25 resident, \$100 nonresident). If using these gears during shrimp season, you must also pay an annual gear fee (\$10 resident, \$40 nonresident).
  - For any legal number of bush, hand, or trotlines (\$25 resident, \$100 nonresident)

\*If you are a Louisiana resident, age 70 or older, you may instead purchase a senior commercial fisherman and gear license for \$20.

To sell blue crabs you have caught to anyone without a Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License (besides consumers) or transport your catch out-of-state, you must have a Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License (\$250 resident, \$1,105 nonresident).

To sell blue crab you have caught directly to consumers within the

state, you must have a Fresh Products License (\$20 resident, \$120 nonresident). Your spouse may purchase a Fresh Products-Spouse License for \$5 to sell directly to consumers.

To apply for LDWF-issued licenses, contact 225-765-2898 or visit LDWF's Headquarters at 2000 Quail Drive in Baton Rouge. Renew your licenses online at [www.la.wildlifelicense.com](http://www.la.wildlifelicense.com).

## Seasons

You may fish for blue crabs year-round. However, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission may prohibit the use of crab traps in certain areas for short periods of time to remove lost or abandoned traps through the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program.

## Legal Gear

You may only use the following types of gear to harvest blue crabs in Louisiana's waters:

Crab trap	Trotline
Crab drop net	Handline
Trawl*	Bushline
Skimmer net*	Dip net
Butterfly net*	Cast net

\*You may only use trawls and butterfly and skimmer nets to harvest blue crabs during open shrimp seasons and must abide by commercial shrimping regulations.

You may not intentionally use dredges to harvest crabs.



## Size Limits

**Hard shell crabs:** You may only harvest crabs 5 inches carapace width or wider. Since at least half of the crab population has sexually matured at this size, this minimum size limit helps ensure crabs have the opportunity to reproduce and replace those that are harvested. You must immediately return crabs smaller than 5 inches wide back to the water without injury.

**Pre-molt crabs\*:** You may harvest pre-molt crabs smaller than 5 inches carapace width under the following conditions:

- You're holding them for processing as soft shell crabs, OR
- You're selling them to a processor for making soft shell crabs and have properly identified them as pre-molt crabs and are holding them in a separate container marked "peelers" or "busters"

\*Pre-molt crabs are crabs showing signs of molting; the first sign is a white line on the back paddle fin.

**Stone crabs:** You may only harvest the claws of stone crabs. The claws must measure at least 2-3/4 inches, measured from the tip of the claw to the base of the joint. You may only transfer legal size stone crab claws from a vessel to the shore. You may keep whole stone crabs on a vessel until you have removed their claws; then you must immediately return the crabs to the waters where you harvested them.

## Possession Limits

**Egg-bearing crabs:** You may not harvest females of any size if they're bearing eggs on their abdomen. You must immediately return egg-bearing crabs to the water without injury to protect this next generation of crabs. No more than 2% of the total number of crabs in your possession may be incidentally harvested, egg-bearing crabs.

**Whole stone crabs:** You may only harvest stone crab claws; you may possess one incidentally harvested whole stone crab per crate of blue crabs (or group of blue crabs equivalent to one crate).

## Bycatch Limits

You may retain for personal consumption up to 25 finfish caught as bycatch in crab traps, per vessel per day. However, you may not keep any freshwater game fish, red drum, or spotted seatrout. Any fish you keep are still subject to recreational size and possession limits.

If you have a gear license which allows you to take finfish for commercial purposes, you may keep any finfish you catch under this license, up to the commercial possession limit for that finfish. You do not have to separate this catch from the bycatch described above.

## Tagging Requirements

You must tag, mark, or otherwise identify any crabs you sell, documenting your name and license number and the date when you harvested the crabs.

## Soft Shell Crab Shedders

If you own or operate a soft shell crab shedding facility, you must purchase a Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License from LDWF (\$250 resident, \$1,105 nonresident). On the tenth of every month, you must report to LDWF the amount of soft shell crabs you produce.

## Did you know?

Since late 2012, LDWF biologists have been fishing different areas with conventional commercial gear (crab traps) to collect and analyze data on bycatch in the Louisiana blue crab fishery. This study will help determine the significance of any bycatch in the fishery and inform future management actions if mitigation is necessary.

## Crab Trap Requirements

<b>Night restrictions</b>	You may not bait, tend, check, or remove crab traps, their contents, lines, buoys, or markers in public waters from one-half hour after legal sunset until one-half hour before legal sunrise.
<b>Trap placement</b>	You must place your traps so vessels can safely navigate waters. Do not set them in navigable channels or entrances to streams.
<b>Unserviceable traps</b>	You must properly dispose of your unserviceable crab traps on shore to reduce the risk and potential impact of derelict traps. If you retrieve a trap with a Commission-approved common float, you must return that float to any shrimper for reuse.
<b>Damage to or destruction of traps</b>	Unless you are the crab trap licenseholder (or his agent), you may not intentionally damage or destroy a crab trap, the attached floats or lines, or its contents.
<b>Trap identification</b>	You must mark your traps to identify the owner of the trap, which helps with enforcement. You may use a plastic bait box cover or a 2-inch stainless steel, self-locking tag attached to the center of the trap ceiling to mark trap ownership. Either one must be legibly engraved or embossed with your commercial fisherman license number.
<b>Floats and float lines</b>	You must mark all crab traps with a solid float, 6 inches in diameter or larger, attached with a non-floating line 1/4 inches in diameter or larger. You may attach crab traps to a trotline attached to a non-floating line and a visible float measuring at least 6 inches in diameter or a half gallon in volume. You must register each crab trap on a trotline with LDWF and must attach a tag with your commercial fisherman's license number. You do not have to mark traps with a float and float line in areas designated as freshwater north of the northern bank of the Intracoastal/Waterway and west of LA Highway 70 and those areas located on the eastern side of the Mississippi River and inland from the saltwater line, unless you're placing the trap in a lake.
<b>Escape rings</b>	Each crab trap must have at least two escape rings, 2-5/16 inches in inside diameter or larger, to allow undersized crabs the opportunity to escape the trap. They must be placed on the vertical outside walls flush with the trap floor or baffle. There must be one ring located in each chamber of the trap. No material should obstruct the escape rings and hamper or prevent crabs from exiting, except from April 1 through June 30 and September 1 through October 31. Escape rings are not required in Lake Pontchartrain or on any crab trap constructed of square wire mesh 2-5/16 inches or larger.
<b>Metal tackle and traps</b>	You may not use metal tackle or metal crab traps in any of the public waters north of the Intracoastal Waterway in the Calcasieu River, in any body of water of the Calcasieu River System north of the Intracoastal Canal, or in Vermilion Bay from Cypremort Point one mile offshore to Blue Point.
<b>Closed area</b>	You may not use crab traps in the Tchefuncte River.

## Resource Monitoring

LDWF is responsible for monitoring the state's blue crab resource, collecting data on the population and the fishery. Throughout the year, LDWF biologists conduct surveys to monitor the growth, distribution, and abundance of blue crab in Louisiana's waters. They tow trawls at a number of sampling locations to capture crabs; they count and measure the crabs and record observations such as blue crab sex, stage, and presence of external parasites.

To monitor blue crab harvests, LDWF requires that dealers purchasing blue crab from commercial fishermen submit trip tickets to capture information about their catch—for example, what it is, where and how it was caught, and how much was caught. Commercial fishermen who sell their catch directly to consumers are also required to submit trip tickets.

LDWF uses all of this information to assess the status of the blue crab resource and ensure the sustainability of the fishery. According to LDWF's most recent assessment of blue crab (2011), both the population and harvest rates are at appropriate levels (not overfished and no overfishing).

## Did you know?

**Derelict traps** are traps that have been discarded, lost, or abandoned. Traps can be accidentally lost if they're separated from their buoys by storms, passing boats, or other reasons. Derelict traps can "ghost fish" and continue to capture blue crabs and other species. They can also create a navigational hazard for boats and become entangled in other fishing gear such as shrimp nets.

LDWF, Louisiana Sea Grant, and volunteers run the annual **Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program** to retrieve these traps and reduce these potential impacts. They also collect data on the number and types of animals found in the recovered traps.

## Compliance and Enforcement

Through events, outreach materials, and resources, LDWF works hard to make sure fishermen understand relevant rules and regulations. LDWF's Law Enforcement Division is responsible for ensuring compliance with these rules and regulations through regular patrols and investigations. LDWF partners with NOAA Fisheries and U.S. Coast Guard enforcement agents and officers to increase their enforcement capabilities and carry out their important mission in Louisiana's waters and beyond.

Penalties for violations vary with the severity of the violation and include fines, jail time, loss of fishing license, and forfeiture of property.

Any commercial fisherman identified as having sold undersized crabs to a wholesale/retail dealer will be subject to penalties for taking and possessing undersized crabs.





LOUISIANA  
IS THE #1  
SUPPLIER OF  
DOMESTIC  
BLUE CRAB IN  
THE NATION.



# Industry Support

## Certified Authentic Louisiana Wild Seafood

LDWF recently launched the Louisiana Wild Seafood Certification Program (LWSCP) to build a brand that guarantees the origin of Louisiana wild-caught seafood. The program establishes rules and guidelines throughout the seafood supply chain that ensure all seafood products bearing the program's logo have been caught in Louisiana waters or the Gulf of Mexico by licensed Louisiana fishermen, then landed, processed, and packaged in our state. The program's goal is not only to increase consumer confidence in the source of their seafood but also to establish Louisiana seafood as a premium product and ensure our industry remains competitive in the constantly changing global marketplace.

The program requires participating seafood dealers and processors to be trained on the program guidelines, state and federal regulations, and best practices for quality and safety. It also requires that participating seafood retailers demonstrate that their seafood products registered and labeled with the LWSCP logo can be traced back to participating dealers and processors. The requirements for this origin-based brand help ensure the integrity and reputation of Louisiana seafood—when buyers see the program's logo, they know they're purchasing authentic Louisiana wild seafood, a product known for fresh flavor, consistent quality, and sustainability.

Find out more at [Certified.LouisianaSeafood.com](http://Certified.LouisianaSeafood.com).

## Seafood Technology Equipment Program

LDWF is developing support for all aspects of the industry, from fishing vessels to processing plants, to modernize their equipment and facilities to improve the quality and safety of seafood. For example, through the Health Permit Compliance Program, LDWF offers grants to docks and processors to help relieve the financial burden of upgrading equipment to meet requirements for obtaining new or maintaining current Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LDHH) permits. For more information about the grant program and its requirements, please contact us at 225.765.3980.





# Buyers and Sellers

## Licenses and Permits

<b>To purchase and resell crabs in Louisiana, you must have one of the following LDWF-issued licenses:</b>		
<b>If you:</b>	<b>You must have:</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
Buy crabs in Louisiana from commercial fishermen for sale or resale	A Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License	\$250 resident, \$1,105 nonresident. There are no restrictions on whom these licenseholders may sell seafood products to.
Buy crabs from a licensed wholesale/retail seafood dealer for sale to consumers for personal or household use	A Retail Seafood Dealer License	\$105 resident, \$405 nonresident
Are a commercial fisherman selling crabs to anyone without a Louisiana Wholesale/Retail Dealer License (besides consumers) or transporting your catch out-of-state	A Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License	\$250 resident, \$1,105 nonresident
Are a commercial fisherman selling crabs directly to consumers within the state	A Fresh Products License	\$20 resident, \$120 nonresident. A \$5 Resident Fresh Products-Spouse License is also available for a commercial fisherman's spouse to sell directly to consumers.
<b>To export any crabs or crabmeat outside the state of Louisiana, you must have one of the following LDWF-issued licenses:</b>		
<b>If you:</b>	<b>You must have:</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
Are a licensed wholesale/retail seafood dealer exporting any crabs or crabmeat outside the state of Louisiana	A Wholesale Out-of-State Crab Shipping License	\$100 for residents and nonresidents
Are a licensed retail seafood dealer exporting any crabs or crabmeat outside the state of Louisiana	A Retail Out-of-State Crab Shipping License	\$100 for residents and nonresidents

## Record Keeping and Reporting Requirements

Dealers and retailers must keep records of the following for 3 years:

- The quantity and species of crab you purchase
- The date you purchase the crab
- The full name and license and/or permit number of the commercial fisherman, wholesale/retail dealer, or out-of-state seller from whom you purchase the crab
- The quantity and species of crab you sell and the name and license number of the person to whom you sell it
- Quantity and species of crab and the date you sell it to consumers

Dealers and retailers purchasing from commercial fishermen or anyone other than a licensed wholesale/retail seafood dealer or fresh products licenseholder must report these transactions every month on LDWF-issued trip tickets, documenting information about the purchase, including what it is, where and how it was caught, sizes and quantities, etc. Commercial fishermen who sell their catch directly to consumers (fresh products licenseholders) are also required to complete and submit trip tickets with this information.

## Shipping Requirements

To operate any commercial transport vehicle and load, unload, or transport seafood, you must have one of the following LDWF-issued licenses:		
If you:	You must have:	Notes:
Are a commercial fisherman transporting your catch to a wholesale/retail dealer	A Commercial Fisherman's License	\$55 resident, \$460 nonresident
Are a licensed wholesale/retail seafood dealer delivering seafood	A Seafood Transport License	\$30 for residents and nonresidents
Are a licensed retail seafood dealer picking up seafood from a wholesale/retail dealer and transporting it to your place of business	A Seafood Transport License	\$30 for residents and nonresidents
Are transporting a licensed commercial fisherman's catch to a wholesale/retail dealer for sale	A Seafood Transport License	\$30 for residents and nonresidents
Are a wholesale/retail seafood dealer	A Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer Vehicle License	\$250 resident, \$1,105 nonresident. Applies for all wholesale/retail seafood dealer commercial transport activities.
Ship seafood out of state	A Wholesale/Retail Seafood Dealer License OR a Transport License purchased in connection with the dealer license	Dealer License: \$250 resident; \$1,105 nonresident Transport License: \$30 for residents and nonresidents



# Louisiana Blue Crab Facts

More than **80%**  
of the total blue  
crab harvest in the  
Gulf comes from  
Louisiana.

**45**  
**million**  
pounds of blue  
crab are landed  
in Louisiana in an  
average year.

**\$43.1**  
**million**  
The dockside value  
of Louisiana's  
2012 blue crab  
harvest

Louisiana has the  
**1st**  
and only  
blue crab fishery  
to be certified sustainable  
by the Marine  
Stewardship Council  
(MSC).

## Get Involved!

To manage Louisiana's blue crab fishery, LDWF and the Commission rely not only on data from scientific studies and landings records but also on input from the public. Our decisions directly impact you, so it's important that we have your input as we define management goals and strategies.

We encourage you to participate throughout the management process to ensure that your interests are considered and that you understand the regulatory process and resulting management actions.

The Blue Crab Task Force, a group made up of representatives from the blue crab industry and relevant state agencies, meets regularly and is responsible for advising LDWF and the Commission on the management and development of the crab industry in Louisiana.

The Commission's monthly meetings and our open regulatory process provide additional opportunities for public input.



Drop us a line

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